



## Religious privilege, tolerance and discrimination (part 1) – Basic principles

### KEY QUESTIONS ??

- What are religious privilege, tolerance and discrimination?

### STIMULUS

#### Headwinds and mosquitos

##### Headwinds and tailwinds

If you've done a lot of cycling, you've probably experienced the phenomenon of headwinds. This is when the wind is blowing you backwards, wind and rain might be going in your face and you have to work extra hard to get where you're going.

If you have time, search for "headwinds" in Google Images. Then do a search for "tailwinds". What differences do you notice?

Tailwinds are harder to visualise. Cyclists tend not to notice a tailwind (when the wind is blowing behind them) as much. When you are cycling with a tailwind, the wind is giving you a little boost, making it easier to get where you're going. This doesn't mean you don't still need to put the effort in, but it is easier. When cycling with a tailwind behind you, the air resistance from your speed can feel like a headwind in front of you.

If you imagine a 15-minute cycle ride with a tailwind behind you, you are likely to hit a few pockets of air where there is briefly a headwind blowing against you. The odds are that you'd be more likely to notice and be unhappy about these brief headwinds.

A variety of sociological and psychological studies back this up. But we can also think about our own experiences. If you're a sports fan you're likely to be upset when you feel a referee makes a bad decision against your team. You might accuse them of bias or favouritism. But if the referee makes a bad decision *in favour* of your team, you might not feel so strongly. If you have siblings and share the housework, you might remember all the times you had to clean their dishes; you probably don't remember the time you left your plate in the sink and they had to clean up for you.

##### Mosquitos and loitering

You might have heard of something called a "mosquito device". These are marketed as anti-loitering devices and they emit a very high frequency noise that is uncomfortable, sometimes painful, for young people (and pets), but generally cannot be heard by older people. This is because of changes in hearing as we get older.

Imagine there is a group of young people who like to hang out around a public bench outside a shop. From their point of view, they are experiencing a 'benefit' of one of the few places to hang out with their friends.

From the shop owner's point of view there is a harm in the young people's monopolisation of the space; it could put off customers. So, the shop owner wishes to purchase a mosquito device to discourage this loitering.

The shop owner experiences the benefits of the device, but not the harms. They do experience the harms of the young people hanging out outside the shop, not the benefits to that social group. For the young people this is reversed.

Based on their different power positions and experiences, the shop owner and the young people are likely to have very different feelings over whether the use of the device is fair.

### Privilege and discrimination

When we talk about privilege and discrimination in a social context, we're talking about unfair advantages or disadvantages which affect groups of people based on their shared (or perceived to be shared) characteristics.

Examples might be racism, sexism, classism, ableism etc. There are all sorts of ways that society is set up to advantage or disadvantage particular groups. These can be complicated and overlapping, and they might not apply to everyone in that group, so speaking in generalisations can be problematic.

One area of privilege and discrimination involves religion. There are many ways in which individuals within religious groups (and those groups themselves) experience unfair advantages (privileges) or disadvantages (discrimination) based on religion.

For example, based on his membership of a religious group, James may experience **discrimination** by:

- Being turned down for a job because an employer is prejudiced against that group.
- Being the subject of unfair police suspicion based on actions of other members of the group.

He may also experience **privilege** by:

- Societal taboos against criticising his religious views.
- Special exemptions to the law for his religious group.

And that's only looking at how society treats that group. There may also be internal dynamics of privilege and discrimination. For example: within John's religious group, the views of men might be given greater weight or authority (**privilege**). But if John was a homosexual and LGBT people were the victims of prejudice within that group, then he might be the victim of discrimination.

### EXERCISES

**Q1.** Why are students at the back of the class less likely to think this was fair?

**Q2.** Why are we better at recognising unfairness that disadvantages us, than those that advantage us, or disadvantage other people?

**Q3.** What is a headwind?

**Q4.** What is a tailwind?